

Assignments Two and Three: Technology Literacy Narrative + Corresponding Visual Essay

Final Draft DUE in class week of 3/03/08 (presentations)

Be ready with a draft and ideas to discuss in conference, 2/20/08 and 2/21/08

Part One:

Using Marshall McLuhan's, Sherry Turkle's, and others' works, write an essay on what digital literacy means to you (and all of us, both in- and outside the academy). For starters, consider these words from McLuhan and Turkle, respectively:

Our conventional response to all media, namely that is how they are used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological idiot. For the 'content' of the medium is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind. The effect of the medium is made strong and intense just because it is given an other medium as 'content.' The content of a movie is a novel or a play or an opera. The effect of the movie form is not related to its program content. (McLuhan 18)

A rapidly expanding system of networks, collectively known as the Internet, links millions of people in new spaces that are changing the way we think, the nature of our sexuality, the form of our communities, our very identities. (Turkle 9)

Regarding the postmodern aesthetic that characterizes computer use, Turkle suggests that we need a new "cognitive map" of how to see and understand the world. In other words, computers—the myriad uses to which we put them—have necessitated a different world view.

On an individual level, computers are able to facilitate pluralism in styles of use. They offer different things to different people; they allow for the growth of different and varied computer cultures. On a larger scale, however, computers now offer an experience resonant with a postmodern aesthetic that [. . .] increasingly claims the cultural privilege formerly assumed by modernism. (45)

If we take Turkle's ideas (and McLuhan's) further, into 2008, we can see these ideas manifested in the various ways that we use new media technologies. Blogging, for example, has become one of the most democratic ways to express yourself, and other technologies – from YouTube to MySpace to Wikipedia – are so much a part of our lexicon that we no longer consider these "new." Further, as Turkle suggests, computers and all that goes with them have effectively altered the way we view the world—and each other.

In your 5- to 6-page essay, consider not only what digital literacy means to you but also what the implications are for all users (and non-users). Your essay should have a clear, context-setting introduction, a strong, arguable and complex thesis, and a startlingly refreshing body of ideas that "enter the conversation."

Draft due for peer review: **February 25th**

Final Draft DUE with visual literacy essay, **March 3rd** (see Part Two)

Part Two:

For the visual narrative essay, you will use the written essay component as a starting point.

The purpose of the assignment is to help you think broadly and deeply about literacies – alphabetic and digital. Further, this assignment is intended to help you become more rhetorically aware of the myriad ways we make meaning—through writing, visual imagery, and sound. How can you represent your ideas

in multiple modes? How, for example, would you choose to narrate, without talking, a “story” about blogging, YouTube, Facebook, or some other activity that’s becoming a part of everyday life?

To complete this assignment, analyze your written text (you may draw from your first literacy assignment) and write a one-paragraph summary, focusing on the main point or idea of the essay. Now imagine how you might construct a visual narrative that draws on the same examples and makes the same point, but using only images, not text. You may find appropriate images on the web (keeping in mind our discussions of copyright and citation), scan in images, or create new ones if you are already familiar with creating digital images.

Arrange your images into a coherent narrative (remember: draw a storyboard first), and place them into a Movie Maker presentation. Consider the design of the presentation and use the features most appropriate for effectively communicating your message to your audience. Keep in mind the principles we learned in class when we looked at designing effective and ineffective presentations.

Audience: For this assignment, your audience will be your peers in this course; you will present the narrative essay as a visual sequence and introduce it verbally to the class.

Product: For this component of the assignment, you will produce a Movie Maker presentation and deliver that presentation to the class. The presentation should be about five minutes long.

Your visual presentation will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- 1) How well your visual essay communicated a clear message to your audience
- 2) How well your choice of visuals worked – too confusing, or too blurry?
- 3) How well you used the transitions and effects, not to make the presentation as glitzy as possible but to make it as clear and simple to understand.
- 4) Overall, did your visual essay add something “new” to the conversation?